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AUTHOR	Powell, Evan R.; Dennis, Virginia C.
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ABSTRACT

A laboratory experiment was conducted with 28 Black and white, male and female Educators in dyadic interaction with a B/w, M/F stranger of fixed location, position, and gaze. Race and sex of stranger influenced Educator-set impersonator distance, gaze and bodily orientation in a one-minute encounter as hypothesized. If many school personnel do vary these interpersonal intimacy dimensions unconsciously, (possibly following cultural norms), they should be made aware of these unintentional messages that may be perceived as racially or sexually discriminatory by recipients such as other staff, parents, and students. (Author)

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EDUCATORS' NON-VERBAL INTERACTIONS IN A LABORATORY SETTING

Evan R. Powell and Virginia C. Dennis
Institute for Behavioral Research
University of Georgia

A laboratory experiment was conducted with 28 Black and white, male and female Educators in dyadic interaction with a B/w, M/F stranger of fixed location, position, and gaze. Race and sex of stranger influenced Educator-set interpersonal distance, gaze, and bodily orientation in a one-minute encounter as hypothesized. If many school personnel do vary these interpersonal intimacy dimensions unconsciously, (possibly following cultural norms), they should be made aware of these unintentional messages that may be perceived as racially or sexually discriminatory by recipients such as other staff, parents, and students.

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Stimulated by work of Hall (1966) and Baxter (1970), among others, the problem in this study was to test a method of analyzing dyadic interaction between subjects and stimulus persons in which the stimulus person, for the purposes of this study, was immobile and mute. It has been determined that various sub-cultures such as Navaho and Black (Hall, 1970) operate in dyads at certain distances and angles of orientation from each other. The point of this study was to see if reliable data could be obtained concerning the distance and direction of gaze of educators when confronted with an ambiguous task; namely, telling a stranger something about themselves in a laboratory setting. The point of the study, which was hidden from the subjects, was that it was hypothesized that there would be certain systematic differences in non-verbal communication to a stimulus person which would be related to whether the stimulus person were Black or white, male or female.

It is acceptable to state that angle of orientation to another person, gaze direction, and closeness are interrelated measures of intimacy. Direction of gaze was coded as: 1-eyes; 2-face; 3-body; 4-held object; 5-peripheral; 6-away. Distance was coded in feet and inches, while angle was estimated in decimal portions of 45 degree increments (i.e., 1-45 degrees facing; 2 = 90 degrees; 3 = 135 degrees, etc.).

Observer reliability was determined in advance in trial runs; the observer was accurate within two inches compared to a steel tape in the range of 0-48 inches; interobserver accuracy showed that the present observer correlated well with another, who was systematically high by 1 to 2 inches. Further checks were run in process, using triangulation methods with the 9-inch floor tiles.

Direction of gaze was observed when stabilized during the one-minute

revelation by the subjects; the unobtrusive observer was eight feet from the dyad in another teaching station, and had full view of the subjects while pretending to study. It was determined beforehand that it was simple to tell whether someone were looking at the eyes or the face of another when subjects were within three feet of each other, which was generally the case in this setting. Angle of orientation was in reference to shoulder line, and could have been moderately inaccurate as a sole measure of intimacy since eye contact can be maintained, with some strain, at even 135 degrees away. Reliability of the observer was as accurate as any other method devised in reliability trials.

Twenty-eight subjects took part in the experiment; four were Black (2 men, 2 women); the whites were equally divided between men and women. Ages of subjects were from 23 to 60; stimulus persons ranged in age from 38 to 42. All were teachers, counsellors, or principals except for one lay therapist.

TABLE 1

GAZE MEANS OF TALKER, ON SCALE OF 1 (AT EYES) TO 6 (AWAY)

		Receiver			
		White		Black	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Talker	White Male	1.9	3.	3.	1.8
	(n)	(7)	(5)	(9)	(8)
	White Female	2.8	2.	1.5	1.5
	(n)	(7)	(11)	(9)	(8)
	Black M & F	1.	1.	1	1.5
	(n)	(1)	(3)	(1)	(3)

TABLE 2

ANGLE OF ORIENTATION OF TALKER TO LISTENER,
ON SCALE OF 1 = 45°, 2 = 90°, 3 = 135°, ETC.

		Receiver			
		White		Black	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Talker	White Male	.1	0.0	.1	.8
	(n)	(7)	(5)	(9)	(8)
	White Female	.4	.4	.1	1.1
	(n)	(7)	(11)	(9)	(8)
	Black M & F	3.	.3	0.0	1.0
	(n)	(1)	(3)	(1)	(3)

TABLE 3

MEAN DISTANCE BETWEEN TALKER AND RECEIVER, IN CM.

		Receiver			
		White		Black	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Talker	White Male	83.6	80.8	69.3	70.1
	(n)	(7)	(5)	(9)	(8)
	White Female	81.3	70.9	83.6	54.1
	(n)	(7)	(11)	(9)	(8)
	Black M & F	2	47.4	61	55.9
	(n)	(1)	(3)	(1)	(3)

White females gazed (Table 1) most directly at Blacks and least directly at white male stimulus persons; white males gazed most directly at white male and Black female stimulus persons. For angle of body orientation (Table 2), white females were most confrontive with Black male,

moderately confrontive with whites, and over 45 degrees with Black female stimulus persons. White males were very confrontive with all except Black female. Distance (Table 3), the most accurate measure, showed white females closer to females, especially Black, and farthest from males, especially Black. White males were closest to Black stimulus persons, and farthest from whites, especially males. One interesting further finding was that Black subjects (8 runs) had a mean distance from all stimulus persons of 18.5 inches (47 cm.) compared to white subjects' mean of 29.1 inches (73.9 cm.) over 64 runs.

All told, where a dyad is not left to seek mutual equilibrium, (a process that Hall calls frustrating when different subcultural norms are operating), it can be seen that the sex and race of the stimulus person differentially affect the behavior of the initiator of interaction in the dyad. If school personnel (of whom this group is an available sample), vary their intimacy dimensions with others solely due to cultural norms, they may be transmitting more than they realize. Since sensitivities of Blacks are elevated due to recent conflicting trends, and women are involved in actions to free themselves as well, persons in professional positions such as those occupied by this sample should be aware of, and should control, non-verbal communication that is unintentional and/or demeaning or discriminatory.

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